

BURIAL

763 When it is seen that a person is about to die the women wail for a while and then they all turn their backs to the dying person and begin to divide up his belongings. The corpse is buried in a grave dug in the village or camp site. The men loosen the soil with sticks and scoop out the soil with gourds until a roughly rectangular grave about 5 feet deep is dug. The men who lower the body into the grave take three balls of soil from the bottom of the grave with which they rub their legs and backs. A man's decorations are placed in the grave with him. In the case of a woman, two or three gourds are placed at her feet. The grave is then covered. A man's bow and arrows are broken and left on the grave. The rest of his belongings are burnt nearby and the people go on a hunt for a few days. A bit of burnt fiber is left to mark the grave of a boy, although nothing appears to be left over the grave of a woman or a girl.

775 The ghost remains around the grave for several days and then goes to the sacred mountain where all the ghosts live. In the land of the dead the ghosts have fine necklaces, and nose feathers, and are always painted with urucú. But they do not wish to be forgotten and want the living to give them food. The Nambicuara do not fear ghosts, and like to have them participate in their ceremonies.

764 Two days before we left Utiarity, Marciano died. He was one of our best informants, the least morose and most helpful. A week earlier he caught cold which turned into pneumonia. It was pitiful to watch this naked man lying in the dirt beside a fire slowly gasping out his life. Once in a while he became conscious and tried to sing, calling the spirits to help him. About 9:30 that night he died. As there is something symbolic in his death and burial I would like to end this account of the Nambicuara with an entry from my diary dated July 30, 1949.

This morning we all went to the burial, the Jesuit priests, the Protestant missionaries, some of the Brásilians, and Kacero and I. We dug a grave at an old Nambicuara camp site about a half a mile from Utiarity. As we walked along the telegraph line bearing Marciano's body the cabé were singing and the air was full of the sweet odor of the timbé vine. Wrapped in a ragged blanket Marciano was lowered into his grave along with his